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A HISTORY OF AGRICULTURAL POLICY:  
CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE

by

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1775--Problems of farm policy, notably British quitrents on American farm land, taxes on agricultural exports, and restrictions on moving west, contributed to the American Revolution.

1785-1787--The Ordinances of 1785 and 1787 provided for the survey and disposal of the vast public domain, insuring widespread ownership of farm land for generations to come.

1790--Farmers are 90 percent of labor force. Virtually all exports are farm products.

1800-1860--Continued movement westward by farmers, with family-operated, self-sufficient type farms in North and plantations and small farms in South.

1810--First farm journal published.

1860--2 million farms in U.S., averaging 199 acres in size. Farmers are 58 percent of labor force. Agricultural exports 75 percent of total exports. One farmworker feeds 4.5 people.

1862--Major agricultural reform legislation, aimed at strengthening family farms.

- Homestead Act
- Morrill Land Grant College Act
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Act
- Transcontinental Railroad Act

1863--USDA begins regular crop reports based on questionnaires sent to cooperating farmers.

1865-1875--First American agricultural revolution, marked by change from hand power to horse power.

1867--National Grange, first general farm organization, established.

1870's-1880's--Large-scale British, Scottish, and Dutch investment in very big livestock ranches on the Great Plains.

1880's--Era of large, Eastern-financed bonanza wheat farms in Red

River Valley.

1880--4 million farms in U.S. averaging 134 acres in size. Farmers are 49 percent of labor force. Agricultural exports 76 percent of total exports. One farmworker feeds 5.6 people.

1880's-1890's--Farmers' Alliances established to promote cooperatives, control monopolies, and obtain higher prices for farm products.

1887--Hatch Agricultural Experiment Station Act passed.

1889--USDA issued its first Farmers Bulletins.

1892--Practical gasoline tractor invented.

1896--Populist Party, outgrowth of Alliance movement, came close to electing President of the United States but failed.

1900--5.7 million farms in U.S., averaging 147 acres in size. Farmers are 38 percent of labor force. Agricultural exports 58 percent of total exports. One farmworker feeds 6.9 people.

1902--Farmer unrest was marked by organization of the Farmers Union (Farmers Educational and Cooperative Union of America) and the American Society of Equity.

1902--Reclamation Act, under which substantial areas of western lands were to be irrigated, was signed. Included "160-acre limitation."

1908--Country Life Commission took close look at American agriculture and farm life, paving the way for later rural development.

1914--Smith-Lever Act formalized cooperative agricultural extension work with the major goal of assisting individual farmers to increase productivity.

1916--Federal Farm Loan Act approved.

1916-1918--World War I brought high farm prices and stimulated plow-up of western wheat lands.

1920---6 million farms in U.S., averaging 149 acres in size. Farmers are 27 percent of the labor force. Agricultural exports 42 percent of total exports. One farmworker feeds 8.3 people.

1920--American Farm Bureau Federation organized.

1920--Farm prices declined sharply, marking the beginning of a major farm depression which led into the great Depression of

1929.

1920's--The USDA, State Experiment Stations, Extension, and other agencies emphasized efficient management of individual farms as way of over-coming depression.

1920's--Many proposals for farm relief legislation introduced into Congress. The McNary-Haugen bill was passed twice and vetoed twice.

1920's--Rise and failure of large-scale cooperatives attempting to control large enough supply of crops to influence prices.

1922--Capper-Volstead Act exempted agricultural cooperatives from some provisions of anti-trust laws.

1922--Idea of farm parity prices proposed by George N. Peek and High S. Johnson in Equality of Agriculture.

1926--Congress created Division of Cooperative Marketing in USDA.

1929--Agricultural Marketing Act, establishing Federal Farm Board, approved.

1930--6.6 million farms in U.S., averaging 157 acres in size. Farmers are 21 percent of the labor force. Agricultural exports 32 percent of total exports. One farmworker feeds 9.8 people.

1930's--Farm holiday movement, mainly in Middle West.

1933--Agricultural Adjustment Act, providing for production adjustment to be achieved mainly through payments to farmers, was passed.

1935--Number of farms peaks at 6.8 million.

1935--Soil Conservation Service established.

1935--Resettlement Administration, predecessor of Farm Security Administration and Farmers Home Administration, established.

1935--Rural Electrification Administration established.

1936--Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 declared unconstitutional. Replaced by Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act.

1938--Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, which has remained as a base for price support and adjustment legislation. It was the first law to provide direct price support for basic commodities through a non-recourse loan program. It included payment limitations of \$10,000.

1940--6.4 million farms in U.S., averaging 175 acres in size. Farmers are 18 percent of the labor force. Agricultural exports 22 percent of total exports. One farmworker feeds 10.7 people.

1941-1945--The Second American Agricultural Revolution, marked by the completion of the transition from animal to tractor power and the application of systems analysis to farming, began during World War II.

1950--5.7 million farms in U.S., averaging 216 acres in size. Farmers are 12 percent of the labor force. Agricultural exports 22 percent of total exports. One farmworker feeds 15.5 people.

1954--For first time, number of tractors exceeded number of horses and mules on farms.

1955--Limited Rural Development Program established by USDA.

1955--National Farmers Organization established.

1956--Agricultural Act of 1956 established the Soil Bank for long-term retirement of surplus farm land.

1960--4.0 million farms in U.S., averaging 297 acres in size. Farmers are 8 percent of the labor force. Agricultural exports 23 percent of total exports. One farmworker feeds 25.8 people.

1962-1970--Most price support and acreage reduction programs put on a voluntary basis.

1964--Food Stamp Act makes food stamp program permanent.

1970--3.0 million farms in U.S., averaging 373 acres in size. Farmers are 4.6 percent of the labor force. Agricultural exports 21 percent of total exports. One farmworker feeds 47.1 people.

1972--Rural Development Act passed by Congress.

1973--Agriculture and Consumer Protection Act emphasized maintaining rather than controlling production. Target prices replaced parity prices for most major commodities. Deficiency payments to be made to farmers for differences between target prices and loan rates.

1977--Food and Agriculture Act approved. Includes farmer-owned reserve program for wheat.

1977-1978--American Agricultural Movement held tractorcades in Washington.

1980--2.4 million farms in the U.S. averaging 427 acres in size. Agricultural exports 19 percent of total exports. One farmworker

feeds 75.8 people.

1981--Agriculture and Food Act continued farm programs but attempted to reduce costs by breaking the tie between inflation indices and target prices. Target prices set anticipated high inflation, which did not occur.

1981--Agricultural exports peak at \$43.8 billion.

1983--PIK (payment-in-kind) program to reduce surpluses in effect.

1983--Dairy and Tobacco Adjustment Act approved to reduce program costs.

1984--Agricultural Programs Adjustment Act prevented automatic target price increases from going into effect.

1985--Food Security Act approved. Secretary given authority to lower loan rates for major commodities to promote exports. Also established a Conservation Reserve Program for highly erodible lands, but, in general, provisions were similar to 1981 Act.

1985-87--Farm Credit System restructured in series of acts after financial crisis threatens the financial health of many rural banks as well as farmers. Agricultural Credit Act of 1987 is the most significant.

1988--United States presents a proposal at the Uruguay round of the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) negotiations to eliminate agricultural subsidies worldwide.

1988--U.S.-Canadian Trade Agreement phases out barriers to trade between the two countries.

1989--2.2 million farms in U.S. averaging 457 acres in size. Agricultural exports 11 percent of total exports. One farmworker feeds 98 people.

1990--Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 maintained market-oriented loan levels, preserved income supports through target prices, permitted greater flexibility in planting through a triple base option, and tightened environmental provisions. To reduce expenditures, the Act's price and income support programs were cut back by the Agricultural Reconciliation Act of 1990.